PLAYING WITH FIRE

CERAMICS OF THE EXTRAORDINARY

CAROL E. MAYER

Alwyn O'Brien
A Matter of Shadows (deatil), 2017
Courtesy of James Harris Gallery

Photo: Ken Mayer

Playing With Fire: Ceramics of the Extraordinary
Carol E. Mayer

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WORKS BORN OF CRAFTSMANSHIP AND ARTISTIC VISION...

OFFERING INSIGHTS INTO THE PARADOX OF THE HUMAN CONDITION.

INTRODUCTION

The eleven artists featured in this publication and the exhibition *Playing with Fire: Ceramics of the Extraordinary* have all lived or worked in British Columbia. Their works span generations and an abundance of art movements and ideas, and reach beyond British Columbia's geographic boundaries, bringing attention to issues and challenges undeniably global in nature.

Clay is their material of choice. Its malleable character enables each artist to wedge, coil, pinch, throw, cast, mould, sculpt and ultimately push the clay to the limits of its plasticity. The results speak to the intense relationship between maker and material, and between clay's transformative qualities and its deep historical references. The sculptural and installation works included here also challenge the notion that all things made of clay are required to be functional. Their selection was guided by our collective determination to wipe away any craft-based, little-brown-pot stereotypes that might still adhere to the ceramics medium.[i]

Drawing inspiration from pop culture, art history, humour, beauty, hope and nature, the artists bring fresh, playful and challenging commentary to ongoing debates and concerns about the world around us. Through their art, they offer insights into the paradox of the human condition.

Senior artists Gathie Falk and Glenn Lewis view their work as a veneration of the ordinary. They portray the world around them, transforming everyday objects from the mundane into the unexpected, capturing a specific ethos, time and place in Vancouver's history.[ii] Interestingly, Lewis' tongue-in-cheek installation of ordinary salt-and-pepper shakers was viewed as too suggestive to exhibit when he first created it for the 1970 Osaka Expo; the piece subsequently languished in storage for two decades. During the 1960s, senior potter David Lambert sought to create uniquely 'Canadian' hand-painted tablewares using Indigenous motifs as surface designs. Today, this work continues to appear in the art market, though with changing sensitivities it is now more likely to be seen as cultural misappropriation, because the motifs interpret clan-owned crests.

Supreme craftsmanship and artistic vision reveal the presence of nostalgia and a sense of loss in Jeremy Hatch's and Bill Rennie's exact replicas of places and things that once were, but are no more. The instability of the laws and wisdom that hold up our society and ourselves is apparent in Alwyn O'Brien's vessel-based sculptures that wend their chaotic, evasive, fragile, yet brilliantly controlled journey upwards and outwards

Some works are autobiographical in their exploration and reinvention of identity. Brendan Lee Satish Tang mixes Asian and pop-culture motifs in his glossy renditions of Chinese blue-and-white ware 'birthing' robotic arms. Ying-Yueh Chuang's exploration of cultural hybridity is expressed in her creation of hundreds of beautifully executed, minute combinations of fragile forms found in nature and her own imagination. In contrast, there is nothing fragile about Judy Chartrand's powerful and unsettling installations that expose and condemn racism, poverty and social injustice as she sees it in the world around her. Because the works are often visually appealing, we are drawn in — only to be confronted with the effects of colonialism, forced relocation and mass immigration.

Forced relocation and religious oppression are the foci of Debra Sloan's sculptural works, as she reacts to themes she detects in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century ceramics displayed in MOA's Koerner Gallery of European Ceramics. She installed repetitions of small amorphous figures throughout the gallery as a strategy to bring historic events into the present. Ian Johnston also uses repetition in his installation of hundreds of tiles that both celebrate significant inventions and critique the immense scale of mass production and, consequently, the massive waste left behind.

Together, these artists draw you into a conversation that cannot be entered with words alone. Daring, contemplative, humorous and visionary, they are creating extraordinary works by playing with fire.

CAROL E. MAYER


HOTEL
BALMORAL
HOTEL
EMPRESS
ASTORIA
HOTEL

JUDY CHARTRAND

Judy Chartrand is Manitoba Cree, born in Kamloops and raised in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. She was artistic as a child but never thought it would come to anything: "I just figured I'd end up cleaning hotel rooms for the rest of my life," she recalls. Two First Nations counselors encouraged her to apply to college, and she was accepted. So began her career as a ceramic artist. Chartrand's early works were autobiographical, situating herself and her family in the history of Vancouver and the post-colonial relations between Indigenous and European cultures. Her practice continues to confront the subjects of colonization, assimilation and identity politics. Her messages are immediate and challenging—and sometimes difficult to view.[ii]

Chartrand is a community activist, has donated works and raised funds for community initiatives, and when she was a student she raised the profile of First Nations art by organising exhibitions and initiating scholarships. She continues to boldly address realities most First Nations people face daily—realities others would prefer to ignore. "I've heard that some people are shocked by my work," she says; "That's the part I don't get. I'm just expressing my reality."

Judy Chartrand
If This is What You Call 'Being Civilized', I'd Rather Go Back to Being A 'Savage'
(installation view, detail), 2003
Rennie Collection

Photo: Alina Ilyasova


ASTORIA
HOTEL

Chartrand's choice to depict the cockroach on this series of five ceramic bowls is significant. Her sense of humour and irony are apparent in her painting of them as cheerful little creatures, tubby and shiny, crowding around once well-known and respected hotels on East Hastings Street. Yet, they universally inspire disgust, are associated with spreading disease, and feed voraciously on the filth in run-down slum dwellings. As an invasive species, they also stand here as symbols of European colonialism. On the underside of the bowls Chartrand created individual stamps of text, signs and decoration in order to position the bowls as representing a First Nations experience:

I was on a school trip to New York City and went to the Metropolitan Museum to see their Native American display. I was saddened by the stereotyping of Indigenous peoples in the exhibitions, and how people made jokes about the clothing and other items. It made me think about how stereotypes were created and passed on from generation to generation. I decided to make a bowl that expressed these thoughts. The title, *If This is What You Call, 'Being Civilized', I'd Rather Go Back to Being A 'Savage'*, addresses my thoughts and views about what we as First Nations peoples had before contact as opposed to what some of us have to face now due to the destructive nature of colonization and racism.

JUDY CHARTRAND

Judy Chartrand
If This is What You Call 'Being Civilized', I'd Rather Go Back to Being A 'Savage', Astoria Hotel, 2003
series of five bowls
clay, glaze
12 cm x 33 cm
Rennie Collection, Vancouver

Photo: Alina Ilyasova

Judy Chartrand
Counteract, 2006
mixed media
approx. 275 cm x 217 cm x 275 cm (installed)
Rennie Collection

Photo: Alina Ilyasova

Chartrand's installation *Counteract* speaks to racism and oppression. It is a whiter-than-white coffee counter with white stools, white condiments, white menu, and white cups with "whites only" lettered on the coffee surface. All the colour in the work is located behind the counter: a game board, a bulletin board covered with sixteen photographs and postcards, and a wall-mounted shelf crammed with forty-five souvenirs and chachkas. These found objects, in addition to Chartrand's skillfully executed ceramic duplications and enlargements, reveal a long history of prejudice and oppression:

My research concentrates on the concept of whiteness and the ideology governing white racism and white superiority. I remember there were places like the White Lunch diner with an all-white staff, so I decided to make an all-white fictional diner, *Counteract*. The chachkas and souvenirs on the shelf are all created by non-Native people. When I was researching it, I gasped at quite a bit of it, like feeding black babies to alligators: it's a whole bunch of quite heavy racism.

JUDY CHARTRAND

Judy Chartrand
Counteract (detail), 2006
mixed media
Rennie Collection

Photo: Alina Ilyasova


NO LIQUOR SERVED TO INDIANS AFTER SUNDOWN
REST ROOMS
WHITE ONLY
REST ROOMS
WHITE
COLORED
L&N
"RICKSHA BOY"
SQUAW
1910 FRUITGUM CO. INDIAN
SPECIAL DELIVERY
LONGWOOD PLANTATIONS
RED MAN
CHEWING TOBACCO
BUY NOW!
WENOKA
RED MAN


MOKE MEANS TROUBL
DISTILLED AND
INSULATED
TEXACO
HAVOLINE
Jap-Hunting
LICENSE
NO LIMIT
DON'T WAIT TILL YOUR CAR SMOKES!
JAP HUNTING LICENSE
OPEN SEASON - NO LIMIT
SEMI SCALP-HUNTER
PEARS' SOAP

Cupboard of Contention, like *Counteract*, also focuses on the concept of whiteness. "Contention is the brutality and everything else that had to do with colonization," Chartrand explains. On the door of the white antique cupboard, the words 'Oh Canada, your Home is Native Land' are a play on the national anthem; the white-and-red cans are representative of First Nations and white cultures. "The soup cans in the *Cupboard of Contention*," Chartrand says, "are labelled 'Canada's Racism,' with titles for colonial processes such as oppression, domination and legislative brutality. The ceramic money stacked inside the cupboard represents the profit made by unscrupulous developers—everybody got paid except for First Nations."

The labels on the cans on the shelves include Sexism, Broken, Treaties, Theft, Dehumanize, Objectify, Murderers, Domination, European Diseases, Control, Oppression, Commodification, Dishonesty, Relocation, Patriarch and Colonization.[iii]

Judy Chartrand
Cupboard of Contention, 2001
clay, glaze, lustre, wood
142.5 cm x 57 cm x 46 cm
Rennie Collection

Photo: Alina Ilyasova

In 1967, when Louis Armstrong sang 'What A Wonderful World,' he sang it to ease the racial and political tensions of that time. Blacks had the hoses on them, dogs set on them, and hangings. White people were telling people of colour to 'go back' to where they came from. The text on the bowl shows that racism is still around us. It is going to be here and people will see it or not, and when you play that song you can believe in things and look at the other side of it. When I hear that song I cry. It's painful. But, while I refuse to be complacent about racism, poverty and injustice, I am also adamant that it is a wonderful world.

JUDY CHARTRAND

Judy Chartrand's work offers recurring and contrasting themes of beauty and ugliness in the world. The bowls in the series *What a Wonderful World* are floral and pretty and approachable. The racist sentiment on the bowl illustrated, "Go back to your own country," continues to be timely with the recent political discussions around immigration, and the Black Lives Matter movement. Chartrand hears such sentiments on the streets of Vancouver, not directed at her but to others: "Why don't you go back to your own country and learn how to speak English?"

Judy Chartrand
What a Wonderful World, Go Back to Your Own Country, 2015
clay, glaze, lustre
33 cm x 12 cm
Rennie Collection

Photo: Alina Ilyasova

Barbara Laroque · Lisa Leo · Rose Merasty · Ray Arrance · Sadie Chartrand · Lorraine Arrance
Wendy Poole · Sheila Hunt · Rhonda McDonald · Bernadine Standing Ready · Chantal Arrance
Peters · Amanda Flett · Susan Ball · Terry Lynn · Velma Parnell · Violet Kenne · Sharon Leah Williams
Lisa Marie Graveline · Nancy Jane Bob · Rose Piapst · Helena George · Deloras Holy Grass · Wendy Lee Cochrane
Ruby Anne Hardy · Maria Laliberte · Tracy Lynn Hope · Ruth Oliver · Marietta Smoker · Tammy Lee Pipe · Dawn Lyn Cooper · Vera Lyons · Mary Johnson · Ramona Wilson · Barb Davis · Barbara Paul · Debbie Kennedy
Connie Chartrand · Darlene Weismiller · Debbie Chisholm · Darlinda Richie · Jenny Lee Lafleshe · Carol Caters
Flammond · Carol Cardinal · Connie Ryder · Rita Holy Whiteman · Theresa Hunchuk · Michelle
Sandra · Tracy Desjarlais · Carrie Ann Starr · Cheryl Anne Joe · Yvonne Stevens

In 1994, Judy Chartrand became involved with the Women's Memorial March in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. During the march she was overwhelmed when she heard her sister's name being called out along with all the other women who had lost their lives through alcoholism and violence. Chartrand lost three sisters and more than six cousins to the destructive lives they lived. She finds it difficult to talk about the loss of her family members, so found a way to express herself through her work:

I was going to do a memorial bowl of just my family members and friends who had passed away, because a lot of them had hit the streets and been killed by alcoholism or violence. When I heard the names of all the women who were lost, I felt anger—not the kind of anger you have when you beat someone up, but an anger that was more a sadness, knowing what they could have been. They never had the opportunity to have dreams, have pride in their culture or their background. When I created the bowl, I decided to include the names of all the women. When I displayed it at a Powwow, a woman came up to me and said, "My sister is on there." I said, "Really, these are also my sisters here." We hugged.

JUDY CHARTRAND

The images on this bowl were inspired by Chartrand's research on Southwest Indigenous designs, especially the complex narratives illustrated on the unique ceramic bowls made by the Mimbres people who lived in New Mexico, CE1000-1130. These bowls were found in burial sites, inverted to cover the faces of the dead. She decided to use images of Mimbres women on her first memorial bowl. They are shown with their hands raised, wanting to be counted and acknowledged. Names of the murdered and missing women and girls are written around the edge of the bowl. "I guess," she reflects, "in some sorrowful way these bowls follow an ancient Mimbres burial ritual of paying respect to so many lives lost."

Judy Chartrand
In Memory of those no longer with us, 2016
clay, glaze
33 cm x 14 cm
Bill Reid Foundation collection
Bill Reid Gallery of Northwest Coast Art

Photo: Alina Ilyasova

YING-YUEH CHUANG

Born in Taiwan, Ying-Yueh recalls a childhood of collecting things found in the environment around her. She lived near a ceramic factory and collected discarded plaster molds from which she made shards to draw designs on the ground; she refers to this as her first experience as a ceramic artist. Throughout her childhood and adult life she has continued to collect objects—plants, vegetables, bones—seeking to discover their secrets and the complexities of their making. These found objects populate her world. They are, she says, "three-dimensional: they cast their own shadow. It's almost as if the shadow is proving it exists. We are out here, we are present." Chuang continues to spend time absorbing the world around her.[iv] She examines every detail, deconstructing the intricacies of nature and exposing them to her gaze and ours—if we pause to look:

Certain ideas I encountered growing up in Taiwan have stayed with me, while others have been abandoned. I am selective about my adaptation to Western philosophies and ways of living. I live a hybrid existence with elements from both cultures, which has influenced my interest in hybridized materials. I combine elements from the natural world to create forms that are symmetrical and asymmetrical. From hybrid forms inspired by organic material and imagined objects, my work comes together through a hands-on process, evolving into forms completely different from the initial object.

YING-YUEH CHUANG

Ying-Yueh Chuang
Flower Series #1 (detail), 2015
porcelain, fabric
302 cm x 12 cm x 265 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Photo: Cody Rocko

Ying-Yueh Chuang
Cross Series #3 (detail), 2008
porcelain, wood
366 cm x 366 cm x 64 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Photo: Alina Ilyasova

In her practice, Ying-Yueh Chuang uses the shape of the cross (+) to symbolize where Paradise exists. She multiplies crosses to create a grid system that is the basis for several series of works. In the *Flower Series #1*, Chuang focuses on addressing social issues, specifically inequality between the poor and the social elite, by using two major craft media: textile and clay. Flower designs on mass-produced fabrics, manufactured for the lower classes, are replaced with expensive, stark-white porcelain flowers, hand-built for the upper classes. She brings them together in a repeat pattern that suggests harmony. "It's like a dream," she says, "I don't even know if it's possible, but in my dream it is about paradise."

Scattered on the *Cross Series #3* is a garden of hybrid plants. It is made to be enjoyed and examined. "I want people to see my happy side," Chuang explains. Each plant is a hybrid form inspired by what is real and what is imagined. They are made individually "as a human being," she says, "with a body and limbs but looking different, with their own personalities." Each casts its own shadow, proving it exists. Individually they are exquisite—collectively they are extraordinary. They are clustered in a cross-shaped· garden, where four rivers meet in a worldly embodiment of Paradise.

Background:
Ying-Yueh Chuang
Flower Series #1, 2015
porcelain, fabric
302 cm x 12 cm x 265 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Foreground:
Ying-Yueh Chuang
Cross Series #3, 2008
porcelain, wood
366 cm x 366 cm x 64 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Photo: Alina Ilyasova

GATHIE FALK

One of my basic tenets is to use the ordinary and make it extraordinary: there it is, in a sentence! This is the boot of my friend, Tom Graff. They were new, had zippers on the inside and were very handsome, and I was happy to make a boot like his, although bigger, because his feet were rather small. The inside, with its zippers and seams, is the emotional side of the boot. The outside, which is displayed in shop windows, is the public and decorative side." They have an ability to symbolize human presence and also human enterprise—tasks undertaken, distances walked—in an unpretentious way.[vii]

Gathie Falk came to British Columbia from Winnipeg, Manitoba. She worked as an elementary-school teacher and began her formal training in the arts. She studied ceramics with Glenn Lewis who had apprenticed with the British potter Bernard Leach in Cornwall, England. Falk says, "Glenn was a wonderful teacher. He tried to turn us students into more thinking people—and that included thinking about the art of daily life... His classes were about learning, not making an object."[v] This was during the 1960s when the avant-garde movement took shape in Vancouver—a time when art was experimental, radical, unorthodox and mainly anti-establishment. Falk's early work was also influenced by the Funk artists of California, whose representations of everyday objects showed her that ordinariness could be transformed into something quite extraordinary. Her work became rooted in the deceptively simple act of observation.

Falk has worked in sculpture, painting, performance and installation to explore motifs of the domestic and everyday, treating simple things as icons. She started to use repetition to celebrate the art that emerges from the ordinary in life. Multiple rows of shoes and boots, stacked piles of apples and snowballs, all became her trademark. Her *Bootcases* idea came to her when passing a shoe store on Fraser Street. She says, "In the window were shelves with men's shoes displayed on them. I found it an interesting image without consciously knowing why, just as I had found the pyramid of apples in the corner grocery store interesting." In her performance pieces she combined the mundane tasks of everyday life—eating an egg, reading a book, washing clothes—together with less ordinary (and sometimes absurd) events such as shining a man's shoes while he was walking backwards singing an operatic aria. Falk continues to venerate the ordinary in her unique way. This installation was her first boot case. She is still making shoes and runners in clay. "There's still too much to do," she says; "too many more things popping into my head, demanding to be seen."[vi]

Gathie Falk
Boot Case with 9 Black Boots (detail), 1973
clay, mixed media
Courtesy of Vancouver Art Gallery

Gathie Falk
Boot Case with 9 Black Boots, 1973
clay, mixed media
192.4 cm x 17.2 cm x 88.9 cm
Courtesy of Vancouver Art Gallery

Photo: Rachel Topham, Vancouver Art Gallery

JEREMY HATCH

Jeremy Hatch graduated from Emily Carr Institute (now University) of Art and Design in 2000. During his graduating year he created a bright yellow, porcelain sculpture of the familiar, mass-produced, plastic Pokémon figure. This was exhibited at MOA in the exhibition *Echoes 2000*, and attracted much attention from young visitors because it was familiar to them, unlike many other works in the museum. "Twenty years later," says Hatch, "it could be read as a poignant evocation of the fragility of our childhood memories and nostalgia for our past."

Hatch now constructs large-scale, cast-porcelain sculptures that replicate something from the mass-produced or natural world. He talks about the act of casting these familiar objects as "a symbolic gesture that, like a photograph, freezes a moment in time, recording and preserving forms and events that are impossible to relive." Similar to the Pokémon figure, *Tree House* recalls an iconic childhood memory and its associated nostalgia. The original tree was climbed with joy and vigour, its revisioning is fragile and vulnerable to breakage. The work is real, all the details are there, but it is immortalised as a ghostly presence—and what it was is no longer within reach. It was a monumental one-year undertaking for Hatch. He made approximately thirty plaster molds of a tree that were then cast in porcelain. Each porcelain section was then arranged over an interior steel armature that supported the work.

Jeremy Hatch
Tree House, 2006
porcelain
365.8 cm x 274.3 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Photo: Alina Ilyasova

Contradictions and expectations are threads that go through all my work. I struggle with the art/craft categories because I like working in both areas. *Tree House* required skill in the craft of working with clay, but the idea of creating a childhood icon expanded it into different areas, and sometimes fine art can do that. People will connect to the piece and form their own narrative. As an artist I want to embrace that sense of discovery and play as I'm making my work, and hopefully that comes through on the finished pieces.

JEREMY HATCH

Jeremy Hatch
Tree House (detail), 2006
porcelain
Courtesy of the artist

Photo: Alina Ilyasova

Jeremy Hatch
Shoe Toss, 2013
porcelain
left: 13 cm x 30 cm
right: 27 cm x 27 cm x 55 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Photo: Alina Ilyasova

Jeremy Hatch initiated the creation of Ricochet Studio (ricochetstudio.com), where he creates and sells limited-edition designs: exact replicas of milk cartons; anatomically correct, tooth-shaped porcelain candy jars; broken Styrofoam recast in porcelain as functional shelves and plates; and shoes also cast in porcelain, every detail preserved and frozen in time. All of these works echo the much larger work, *Tree House*, in their attention to detail and astute observation of the world around them. In *Playing with Fire*, two pairs of the shoes are suspended over a high wire: a pair of men's sneakers and a pair of baby shoes molded from a pair once worn by Hatch's grandfather. Overhead cables carry a charge to the laces that power lights within. The ubiquitous sight of such shoes over a powerline inhabits many roles in our collective imagination and urban mythology:

I like that pairs of shoes tossed over a high wire can have multiple connotations, depending on the viewer's background and knowledge. Someone might interpret them as a nostalgic throwback, while another will associate them with more sinister urban drug-sale/death/gang territory. I don't want to impose a particular reading on the piece. It's interesting to me that two people can look at the same object and it can represent very different meanings.

JEREMY HATCH

IAN JOHNSTON

Ian Johnston is an architect-turned-sculptor based in Nelson, BC. As an architect, his interest in urban renewal and public intervention stems from working, during a time of cultural transformation, at the Bauhaus Academy in former East Germany, post-Berlin Wall. As a sculptor, he uses ceramics and mixed media to investigate opportunities that present themselves in the experimental process, and that result in inventions. "Today," he says, "we are a culture that views invention and science as panaceas. Optimism and denial coexist and mask the stark reality of a highly unstable global condition." *Antechamber* presents four installations of hundreds of ceramic tiles that are installed in grids, hung like roof tiles, overlapping one another, creating oscillating amounts of visual disturbance as the viewer moves within the space.[ix]

I think of my work as an object for facilitating and engaging audiences to explore, examine and reinvent their relationship with the environment. I create archival documents and spatial experiences that engage the senses and the desires that advance consumption, as opposed to a stick-waving exercise of admonishment. In *Antechamber* I present four installations that explore the other end of the consumption process: the invention. By referencing multiples of important nineteenth- and twentieth-century objects of invention that feed the cycle of consumption, my intent is to transform the euphoric anticipation and naïve optimism of invention/consumption into a vertiginous state of imbalance.

IAN JOHNSTON

Ian Johnston
The Antechamber, 2013
porcelain, stoneware, terracotta
installation: 375 cm x 1280 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Photo: Alina Ilyasova

Left:
Ian Johnston
The Antechamber (detail), 2013
left: *Between the lines (Light)*, 2010
stoneware
right: *Between the lines (Red Deer)*, 2011
porcelain
Courtesy of the artist

Photo: Alina Ilyasova

Right:
Ian Johnston
The Antechamber (detail), 2013
porcelain
Courtesy of the artist

Photo: Ian Johnston

Johnston created the individual ceramic elements in *Antechamber* by a vacuum-forming process of his own invention. Originally developed to open up new opportunities for his art practice, this process led him to experiment with mass castings of everyday objects: a 1950s Dutch tabletop telephone, a 1940s GE streamline kettle and an incandescent light bulb. Johnston presents these in a relentless repetition that evokes the massive scale of consumer goods manufacturing today — production that feeds an ever-growing demand while ignoring the inevitable: that all will eventually become detritus.

DAVID LAMBERT

In the 1960s, David Lambert (c.1906-1985) produced ceramics painted with his interpretations of Northwest Coast First Nations designs. He was not the only non-Indigenous potter to do so, but is probably the most well-known. Lambert wanted his ceramics practice to be economically viable, and early on decided he could achieve this by creating wares that were distinctively Canadian. "We were in a new country and doing a new thing in that country," he wrote; "But what were we doing? All that we had done was to import all the old methods of doing pottery and what we were making and selling could be made and sold in any country in the world by thousands of potters." He recalled that a friend, Bill Marshall, told him, "What you're doing is all very well and good, but as far as BC is concerned, you're not doing a thing." People across Canada at this time were searching for a Canadian identity. Marshall saw this and encouraged Lambert "... to study the country and the people who live in it, especially the first peoples here, the coast Indians, and see that they did, and try to follow along with what was started here but seems to have stopped."[xiv]

Lambert says, "We went to the Indian peoples themselves (a very rare thing I found) and they were most helpful and kind, terrifically interested... Many people came to tell us of things that happened in their childhood and to show us designs used on everyday objects. They took my breath away. The understanding of shapes, line, use of colour, symbolism, showed much more than we had thought... After five years of real hard work we decided to do something with it and see what we could do."[xv]

David Lambert
Trickster raven inside the great killer whale after his escape from the irate husband, 1968
clay, glaze
3.8 cm x 28.9 cm x 42.8 cm
MOA collection, 3122/2
Donated by Robert Kingsmill

Photo: Jessica Bushey

Left to right:

David Lambert
#7 Houskana, The Fisherman, ca. 1960
clay, glaze
12 cm x 14 cm x 5 cm
MOA collection, 2781/2
The Raymond Tetsuo Sato Collection

Photo: Kyla Bailey

David Lambert
#37, Dragonfly, ca. 1960
clay, glaze
12.5 cm x 9.3 cm
MOA collection, 2781/1
The Raymond Tetsuo Sato Collection

Photo: Jessica Bushey

David Lambert
#11, Hooyah, The Raven, ca. 1960
clay, glaze
12 cm x 14.5 cm x 9.5 cam
MOA collection, 2781/11
The Raymond Tetsuo Sato Collection

Photo: Jessica Bushey

David Lambert
#30 Thunderbird, ca. 1960
clay, glaze
7.7 cm x 12 cm x 8 cam
MOA collection, 2781/7
The Raymond Tetsuo Sato Collection

Photo: Jessica Bushey

There is no doubt from his writings that Lambert was enthusiastic, respectful and worked closely with Indigenous community members in the creation of a popular line of pottery with a unique Canadian identity. This is evidenced in his recording of the stories associated with each crest in his publication, *The story of west coast designs*.[xvi] However, his use of these stories and his painting of clan-owned crests on pottery was not subjected to the same kind of scrutiny it would receive today. Now, some fifty years later, the use of Indigenous designs is subject to cultural copyright concerns and attempts by Indigenous communities to protect their traditional arts and forms of cultural expression. This leaves the value or place of Lambert's (and others') ceramic wares uncertain in relation to broader discussions about the ethics and impacts of misappropriation.


JULY 6
JULY 6
JULY 7

GLENN LEWIS

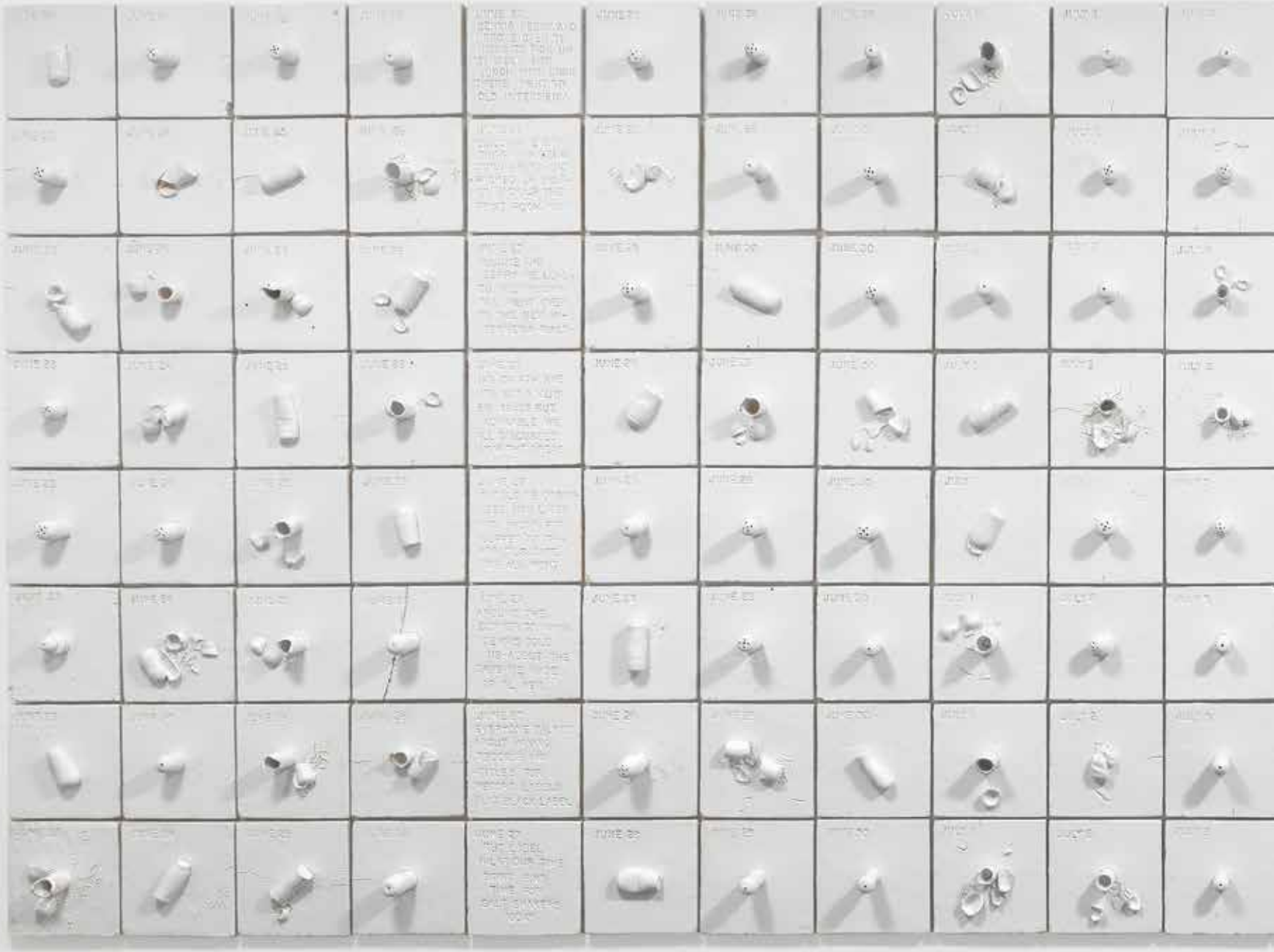
Glenn Lewis began his Vancouver-based art practice in the 1950s, a time of radically shifting social, political and aesthetic values. Throughout his prolific career he has practised as a potter, photographer, videographer and performance artist. Always exploring, questioning and dismantling everything around him, Lewis takes the very ordinary into realms of unique artistic expression. He believes artists have to be inspired by everyday life because, as he says, "What else is there?" Having recently returned to pottery, he is now combining pots with photography in linear installations that seamlessly bring art and craft together.

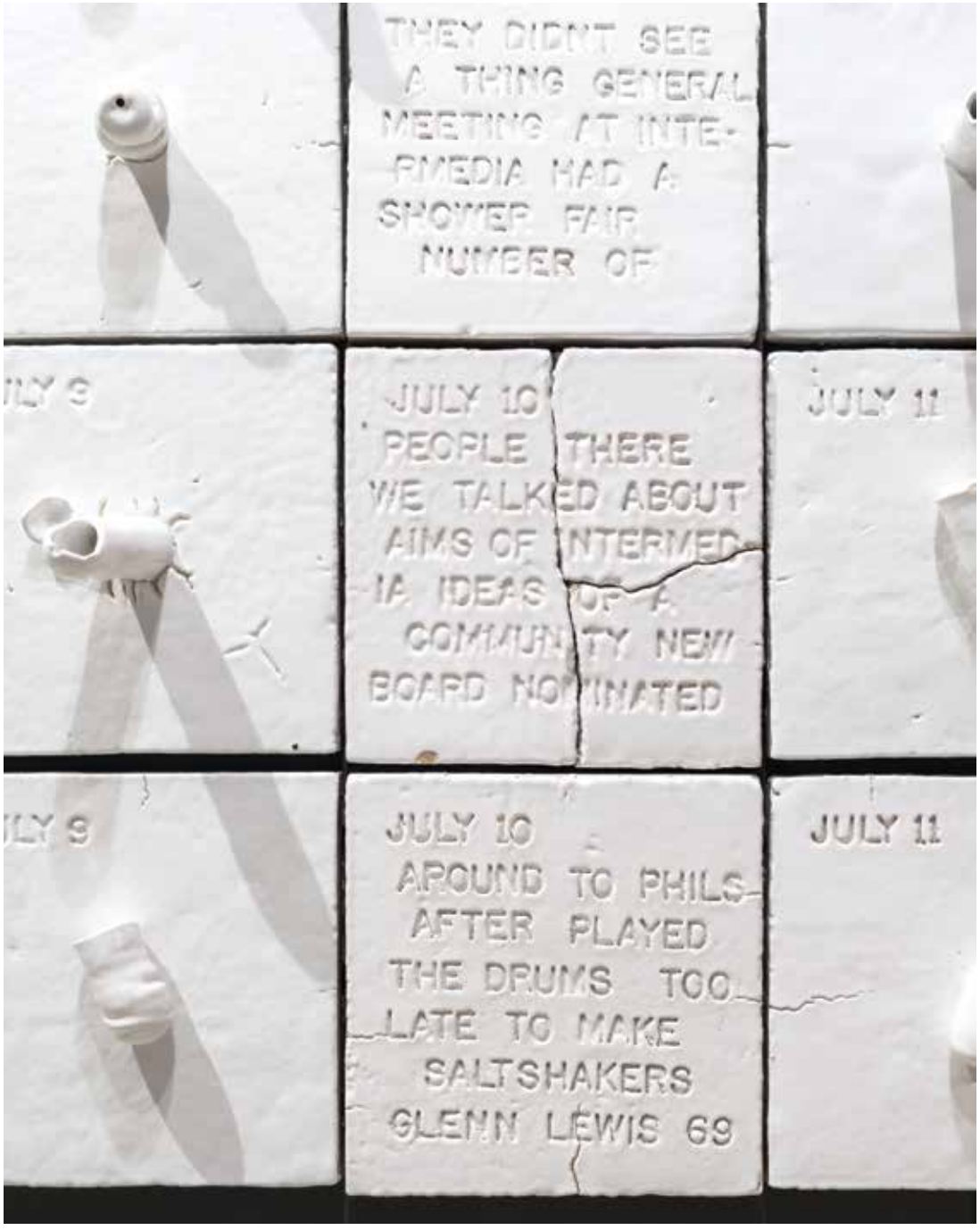
The use of repetition seen elsewhere in the exhibition and this publication is echoed in Lewis's ceramic mural *Artifact*, created for the 1970 Expo in Osaka. He explains, "my concept entailed making square-foot, dated tiles attached by glazing, to white porcelain salt and pepper shakers that I made and kiln-fired at the Crane toilet factory in Burnaby. Most of the salt shakers were broken before glazing, and this presented a kind of 'lunar' aspect."[xvii] When it was unpacked in Osaka, the Canadian Commissioner in charge of the pavilion deemed it too suggestive and refused to exhibit it there. "They made a big stink about it and sent it back without payment of the final installment," Lewis recalls; "I was thrown aside." He later rescued the work from an architectural salvage dealer in Ottawa and brought it back to Vancouver, where it was acquired by the Vancouver Art Gallery. What began with making something extraordinary out of ordinary objects became a focus for criticism — not about the work itself, but about the power of censorship.

Glenn Lewis
Artifact (detail), 1970
clay, glaze
Courtesy of the Vancouver Art Gallery
Vancouver Art Gallery Acquisition Fund

Following spread:
Glenn Lewis
Artifact, 1970
clay, glaze
762 cm x 244 cm
Courtesy of the Vancouver Art Gallery
Vancouver Art Gallery Acquisition Fund

Photos: Rachel Topham, Vancouver Art Gallery




THEY DIDNT SEE
A THING GENERAL
MEETING AT INTE-
RMEDIA HAD A
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NUMBER OF
JULY 9
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PEOPLE THERE
WE TALKED ABOUT
AIMS OF INTERMED-
IA IDEAS OF A
COMMUNITY NEW
BOARD NOMINATED
JULY 11
JULY 9
JULY 10
AROUND TO PHILS-
AFTER PLAYED
THE DRUMS TOO
LATE TO MAKE
SALTSHAKERS
GLENN LEWIS 69
JULY 11

I made eight salt shakers a day for twenty-two days. They started in June and went into July, like a diary. I took two days off because I was busy doing something else, so I wrote about my day on the blank tiles. It was very ordinary, a continuation of what I had been doing. I threw each salt shaker and I made extras in case some didn't make it. I broke a lot intentionally, and laid them on the surface. Word got out that they looked like penises and I was asked to break more, so I did. You could have a laugh about it, maybe.

GLENN LEWIS

Glenn Lewis
Artifact (detail), 1970
clay, glaze
Courtesy of the Vancouver Art Gallery
Vancouver Art Gallery Acquisition Fund

Photo: Alina Ilyasova

WEDGE, COIL, PINCH, THROW, CAST, MOULD, SCULPT

...AND
ULTIMATELY
PUSH THE CLAY
TO ITS LIMITS.

ALWYN O'BRIEN

Alwyn O'Brien was born on a rural property on Salt Spring Island, British Columbia to a family of makers and gardeners. She began her ceramics career as a functional potter, but soon discovered she was less intrigued by the notion of function than by the challenges posed by the materiality of clay. She found it paradoxical, at once supremely yielding but also infinitely dismissive. She says, "You think, in those beginning stages, that you're entering into this easy fluid material that you can have your way with, and then you never can." She became absorbed by the migratory nature of ceramics, how surface treatments tracked the intersections of culture in time and space. "If you look at Greek or Persian pots," she adds, "they are the original cinema, they are the original graphic novel, they are an unfolding, three-dimensional, narrative space." This sense of enquiry continues to underlie her practice.

O'Brien's current work is informed by her extensive knowledge of the history of decorative arts and her passion for the baroque. "When you are working with clay, with the vessel," she says, "you are immediately in conversation with all those that went before you." O'Brien explores the limitations of clay's plasticity and fragility. She is intrigued by this threshold and creates precarious forms that push the limits of their structural integrity. "The whole reason I like doing it," she explains, "is because I don't know what is going to happen — and that's the space that is exciting to me. I like to build to the point where I feel like it will collapse." She is at odds with her own process, and any attempts to unpack her work is doomed to failure. It simply isn't what it seems. Each piece is hand coiled, irregular in shape and seemingly chaotic in the way the coils are used to construct volume; each vessel becomes an organic mass of tendrils while taking on classical historical form. O'Brien challenges our belief that there is a coherent solidity to structures and that they will hold us up, whether they be laws or systems already in place. "There is an inherent precarity and tension that is close to not being stable," she concludes; "My sense of being in the world is precarious."

Alwyn O'Brien
Tree of Life: Ocean of Generosity (detail), 2019
porcelain, glaze
45 cm x 35 cm x 53 cm (overall)
Courtesy of James Harris Gallery

Photo: Alina Ilysova

Currently, my work is influenced by the love of clay, phenomenology, contemporary dance, walking, historical porcelain, baroque sculpture, mythology and the unconscious. This is a heady brew that keeps me going again and again to draw out my thinking in clay. I view the line of coiled clay as an extension of the body into space, interrupting a declarative border between one and the other, expressing the intrinsic connectedness of space and time. Surface becomes form; form dissolves into space.

My understanding of instability as a conceptual foundation informs my desire to interrogate the resoluteness of the fired ceramic object, attempting to push its inherent stability to a definite point of tension.

ALWYN O'BRIEN

The installation *What To Do With All These Blue*s references eighteenth-century garnitures: groupings of matching, but not necessarily identical, decorative vessels that were displayed on mantelpieces over a fireplace. The vessels in O'Brien's garniture are not so much decorative as they are a point of departure for sculptural exploration. O'Brien's commentary on the past, the weight of history and personal references is reflected in her individual titling of the central works: *Together, In-Between,* and *Apart*.[xviii] These are precarious, battered and unstable, on the edge of collapse, made during a time of personal grief. "It's all in the mix," she says. The two vases that frame the group are solid and opaque; they contain/protect/anchor the central works, holding up the weight of history and reaffirming belief systems.

Alwyn O'Brien
*What To Do With All These Blue*s, 2014
porcelain, glaze
Installation approx. 232cm x 200 cm
Courtesy of James Harris Gallery

Photo: Alina Ilyasova

Part garden, part painting, *California Night Sketch* is one of a pair of "Guardian" vessels that also includes *Old Master and the Seed Bed Together at Last*. This series by Alwyn O'Brien originated from a mixture of her memories of California with its art world and huge gardens, and her fascination with the designs of sweaters from the 1980s. "These personal motifs," she says, "are used as a foundation to think through the work of Matisse and other 'old masters'." She has combined shades of green, peach, pink and black from this unlikely grouping of sources to create an idiosyncratic painting in clay. Interestingly, Alwyn chose to work in earthenware rather than porcelain, which may explain the well-grounded aspect of this vessel: it is held up by a solid earthenware arch or bridge-shaped base, yet maintains the sense of fragility and tangle of ideas apparent in all of Alywn's porcelain work.

Alwyn O'Brien
California Night Sketch, 2014
earthenware, glaze
40 cm x 25 cm x 47 cm
Courtesy of James Harris Gallery

Photo courtesy of artist

Alwyn O'Brien created *A Matter of Shadows* for an exhibition at the Esplanade Gallery in Medicine Hat to commemorate Canada's 150th anniversary. "I was pretty conflicted about doing this," she says, "because of the obvious problematic history and continued impact of colonialism. So I made it a narrative piece," she explains; "The two architectural columns were made to interrogate both the dichotomy and the intersection of experience (wildness and culture), as well as the built-in fallacy of these structures that hold up our cultural systems. As with all built things, ideological or physical, there is an inherent precarity and tension. We take a lot for granted and we make assumptions about what appears to be Truth, whether it be laws or the systems we have in place. But we are so close to not being stable. The columns could unravel at any moment. It was important for me that they could: that the space of the in-between, though scary, is also a space of potential — of change."

Alwyn O'Brien
A Matter of Shadows, 2017
porcelain, glaze
125 cm x 75 cm x 30 cm
Courtesy of James Harris Gallery

Photo: Ken Mayer

BILL RENNIE

After completing a Bachelor of Arts degree at the University of British Columbia in 1978, Bill Rennie went on to study sculpture at the Vancouver School of Art (now the Emily Carr University of Art and Design). He was an art instructor, a board member of various artists' organisations and a political activist. His practice can be viewed as a lifelong response to the complex surfaces and structures of historical buildings.[xix] One extraordinary work, quite different from his usual genre, is *Where I was Brought Up: 6949 Harris Road*, a large sculpture that links popular forms of entertainment like the diorama, topographical model, theatre set or a child's toy.[xx] This was Rennie's childhood home, demolished to make space for urban development.

Actually, there is no 6949 — it's twelve houses now. No Harris Road — it is there, but it's got a numbered name. No North Surrey. No 2-acre lots for any normal people like us, because of taxes. Even the hill just before the house is miniscule. I've changed, but the old house is gone. And you just remember the good old times — it's like they stole it. Now it's just a memory. The more I worked on the model, the more indignation I felt for the loss.

BILL RENNIE

Bill Rennie
Where I Was Brought Up: 6949 Harris Road (detail), 1990
Courtesy of Surrey Art Gallery

Photo: Courtesy of Surrey Art Gallery and SITE Photography

Bill Rennie's identity and politics are rooted in this place of his childhood. As a boy he fueled his imagination and passion for history by building models—castles of mud, cities of old tar paper—in secret places within the mysterious forest of trees that grew behind the house. Creating models became central to his art practice. They were poetic portraits of ancient monuments in distant lands that survived, transformed by time and decay—unlike his own home, which was totally demolished to make way for urban development. This model of his home, like his ancient monuments, is exquisite in its detailed rendering of every building, plant, tree and secret place, all derived from memory. There is nostalgia embedded in its making, and pain experienced in being separated from a past now gone.

Rennie transformed his pain and anger into political action by serving as president of an advocacy group, Artists for Creative Environments. Even then, however, he was frustrated by "development barons who captured the concept [of affordable housing] and turned it into lofty live/work/play condos." Today, the need for affordable housing, like other issues around urban life, has become central to political debates.

Bill Rennie
Where I Was Brought Up: 6949 Harris Road,1990
clay, glaze, watercolour
82 cm x 55 cm x 165 cm
Collection of Surrey Art Gallery

Photo: Courtesy of Surrey Art Gallery and SITE Photography

In 2005, Bill Rennie wrote, "Many real historical buildings just have a nice façade but a model must be cohesive and at least be interesting (if not pretty) from all sides. Most buildings I make, and any real building built before steel and reinforced concrete, are pyramidal — squat or tall, they all step up to a point, and this is a form we innately find pleasing — stable and right. The low relief patterning I use is, to me, a regularized and meaningful texture that adds to the richness of a piece without disguising its form."[xxi]

Left:
Bill Rennie
Temples (installation view), ca. 1990
left: 17.7 cm x 12.7 cm x 12.7 cm
middle: 20.3 cm x 11.4 cm x 10.6 cm
right: 20.3 cm x 11.4 cm x 11.4 cm
clay, press moulds, glaze
Collection of John David Lawrence

Right:
Bill Rennie
Tower, ca. 1990
clay, press moulds, glaze
38 cm x 20.6 cm
MOA collection, 3302/1 a-b
Donated by Ian Thom

Photos: Alina Ilyasova

DEBRA SLOAN

Debra Sloan began her ceramics career through a six-year, self-directed apprenticeship in 1973, attaining her BFA 30 years later. She says, "The act of tracing roots through immigration, and following the outcomes of influential art movements has laid down a foundation in my practice. I use this notion of connectivity to make objects that speculate on how the singular and the specific can emerge from multiple sources."[xxii]

Sloan created a series of sculptures during her artist residency at MOA in 2018. She researched the Koerner Collection of European Ceramics, but was seeking a framework that wasn't about the works, as she didn't simply want to make a new version of what was there. Instead, she took the opportunity to see how the ceramics reflected history and how this could inspire her in making connections to her own work. The eleven figurative works Sloan produced echo some of the themes of sexuality, censorship and persecution found in some of the installations shown in *Playing with Fire*. Nothing specific dictates how her works should be interpreted, yet their absolute elusiveness suggest engagements with issues of our contemporary time.

My notion was to cut the figures in half, based on the belief that when you are a migrant you leave part of yourself behind. I didn't decorate them; there was nothing to be gained by adding detail. It is all about profile and outline. They moved as they dried, and I hoped the first one would take the weight of those behind.

DEBRA SLOAN

Debra Sloan
Border Line, 2018
porcelain, glaze
29 cm x 20.3 cm x 8.9 cm
MOA collection, 3417/1

Photo: Alina Ilyasova

The Koerner Collection is a testament to the resourceful perseverance of individuals suffering from persecution. I make my singular objects to represent the distinct and particular, versus the collective. Each piece is made as a stand-alone, my contact with the material is personal, my portrayals are emotive, and my ideas can be detected in each figurine's gesture or gaze. Over time my figures have become what I call proto-human, both male and female, adult and child. The expressions on their faces are ambivalent, neither happy or sad, yet a single raised eyebrow signals something is happening, not to dictate how they should be received, but they invite meaning.[xxiii]

DEBRA SLOAN

By the Sea, city girl with crow has a pictorial narrative featuring a bleak, modernistic interpretation of the idealised architectural images found on Haban ware, and the scale design offers two versions of similar designs found on Italian ceramics. Sloan says, "If somebody really thought about this piece they would put it together. The crow is a metaphor for urban life, especially Vancouver."

Finial with Martyr's Leaf is holding a palm leaf, often signifying martyrdom or sacrifice, an allegory for the artistic sacrifice of the reformist Italian potters who joined the forbidden Anabaptist sect.

The Apple does not Fall Far from the Tree responds to the Adam and Eve theme found on Delftware plates. Sloan remembers going to church as a child and learning how the female Eve was blamed for the downfall of mankind and therefore needed to be punished and controlled—and that keeping women controlled makes society more manageable. "Women," Sloan says, "should never be complacent. Nothing is certain. It is a massive cautionary tale."

Left to right:

Debra Sloan
By the Sea, city girl with crow, 2018
clay, glaze, coloured slips, wire hair
29.2 cm x 7.6 cm x 7.6 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Debra Sloan
Finial with Martyr's leaf, 2018
clay, glaze, coloured slips
31 cm x 10.7 cm x 12.7 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Debra Sloan
The Apple does not fall far from the tree, 2018
clay, glaze, coloured slips, wire hair
31.7 cm x 11.4 cm x 10 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Photo: Alina Ilyasova

Water for Many — Holy water stoup was inspired by a ceramic work displayed in the Koerner Gallery of European Ceramics, depicting Veronica holding the cloth she used when she stepped forward to wipe the face of Jesus as he struggled with the cross on his way to Calvary. His image remained on the cloth, which in the ceramic rendition doubles as a stoup for holy water. Sloan's figure is also coming forward to help, but Sloan's Veronica is an embodiment of the global migrant crisis, her benevolence being directed at multiple migrant figures that cling to the basket she is carrying. While Sloan was making this work she was aware of the many migration crises occurring throughout the world, with some countries welcoming migrants and others rejecting them.

Left:
Holy water stoup, Solvakia,1746–1800
clay, glaze, paint
23.3 cm x 17.4 cm x 7.7 cm
MOA collection, Ch159

Right:
Debra Sloan
Water for Many — Holy water stoup, 2018
clay, glaze, floral transfer, coloured slips
24 cm x 12.7 cm x 6.3 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Photo: Cody Rocko

In this work, *The Apple Does Not Fall Far from the Tree*, Debra Sloan has given Adam the apple and removed the foliage of modesty from both figures, revealing their sexual identity. She explains:

I went to church as a child, so I know the story of Adam and Eve, and how the female had always been blamed for the downfall of mankind and therefore needed to be punished and controlled. Pain in childbirth is one of her punishments. Men in power (the Church) make society more manageable by keeping women under control. There is this notion that women have no souls and need to be controlled so that men can have their freedom. Women should never be complacent—nothing is certain. It is a massive cautionary tale… And who decided it was Eve who took the apple, anyway?

DEBRA SLOAN

Debra Sloan
The Apple Does Not Fall Far from the Tree, 2018
clay, glaze, coloured slips
31.7 cm x 11.4 cm x 10 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Photo: Ted Clarke

BRENDAN LEE SATISH TANG

Brendan Lee Satish Tang was born in Dublin, Ireland, of Chinese-Indian-Trinidadian heritage. He immigrated to Canada in 1982 and currently lives in Vancouver. "There wasn't an ethnic enclave to exist within," he says, "only as Trinidadian, which is a hodge podge of people from all over the world. A lot of my work comes off a bit like the affable immigrant, where you smile and make jokes, and there are times when it's a difficult position to hold—but it enables me to get into situations. I don't look like a typical Westerner, but in my brain I think I am very Canadian or North American." Tang references his Asian ancestry to create works that exist in an illusionary space where reality is not what we are accustomed to. Tang views identity as something malleable and open to appropriation that can be amplified by digitized technology; he is interested in the way our persona and self-representations change to suit the spaces we occupy, whether on social media, with friends or with family.

Installation of Brendan Lee Satish Tang's works in *Playing with Fire: Ceramics of the Extraordinary*

Photo: Alina Ilyasova


HD

There are many conversations going on within these works. Some feed into our unconscious knowing of ceramics as functional items, others allude to them being tools that have a function. I add jacks, wires and cables that challenge the viewer to puzzle out what the object actually does. You may think it must be an audio device or an object that is broadcasting or receiving a signal, because you have something analogous in your world that looks like that. By inviting you to think about what the object is and—the bigger idea—what that means, I'm placing you in an uncomfortable space of not knowing. That's a space where I often reside.

BRENDAN LEE SATISH TANG

Brendan Lee Satish Tang
Manga Ormolu Version 4.0-z, 2011
earthenware, glaze
55.8 cm x 81.23 cm x 55.8 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Gallery Jones

Photo: Alina Ilyasova

Left:
Brendan Lee Satish Tang
Manga Ormolu Version 5.0-p, 2013
earthenware, mixed media
47.6 cm x 25.4 cm x 25.4 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Gallery Jones

Photo: Suzanne Ward

Right:
Brendan Lee Satish Tang
Manga Ormolu Version 4.0-h, 2009
earthenware, glaze
38 cm x 40.6 cm x 23.3 cm
MOA collection, 3386/1
Purchase funded by the Michael O'Brian Family Foundation

Photo: Brendan Tang

Manga Ormolu is a series of works Tang has been developing for fifteen years. Early versions were characterized by decals and unglazed elements attached to porcelain bodies. These were followed by experiments with form, air brushing, painting and mixed media. Tang categorized each work by appropriating the numbering system used for software upgrades: OS.9.8, for example. He says, "I was enjoying the bleeding edge of technology and was an early adopter, so I did appropriate the idea, and my numbering system does mean something."

Tang's Manga Ormolu series employs mainly blue-and-white Chinese ceramics as metaphors of a culture or identity that doesn't belong to him—he views them as lost family members. Tang distorts traditional Chinese forms by taking on elements of folds, skin or fabrics that peel back to reveal, or give birth to, robotic prosthetics underneath. "I started to wrinkle the skin where the robotic elements started really influencing the work and had a binding-like, almost violent, relationship with the Vase forms. Robotic elements were no longer attachments but became part of the Vase, emerging from within. Tang often cites the early Terminator movies, "when Arnie Schwarzenegger would get damaged; his face gets peeled back and you'd see the robotic elements underneath."

The works are approachable, playful, bright and humorous, while offering a subtle critique. They provide points of access for people to join the conversation and to start unpacking or contextualizing what they see. Tang explains, "Those little objects are microphone jacks for stereos, and commonly used for plugging into guitars. This work feeds into our unconscious knowing of ceramics as functional items. A lot of these objects allude to function, allude to being tools that do something. I feel that when I start adding jacks and wires, you, as the viewer, have to sit there and puzzle out what the object actually does."

Left:
Brendan Lee Satish Tang
Manga Ormolu Version 6.0-b, 2016
earthenware, mixed media
81.2 cm x 30.5 cm x 30.5 cm
Private Collection

Photo: Suzanne Ward

Above:
Brendan Lee Satish Tang
Manga Ormolu Version 6.0 study, 2016
earthenware, mixed media
35.5 cm x 25.4 cm x 25.4 cm
Private Collection

Photo: Gallery Jones

#lovechild is the result of a collaboration between artists Alex McLeod and Brendan Lee Satish Tang. Tang mimics museum displays of ceramic shards or fragments by presenting his vessel as an incomplete object. McLeod then offers a new narrative that transforms the static, broken object into a complete, living, breathing organism. This melding of the real and virtual offers a new way for viewers—who appear on the screen—to connect with an object in a gallery setting without the use of a smartphone or any other device.[xxiv] Whereas Tang's incomplete vessel is trapped in specific periods and cultural styles, McLeod's virtually created, organic work exists outside any specific time and place; it is free to change, seemingly at will, unaffected by the viewers who can only appear on the screen as virtual onlookers.

Brendan Lee Satish Tang, Alex McLeod
#lovechild, 2011
earthenware, glaze, video
100 cm x 55.8 cm x 65 cm
Courtesy of Brendon Lee Satish Tang, Alex McLeod and Gallery Jones

Photo: Alina Ilyasova


WERNER

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With special thanks to Susan Rowley for curating the David Lambert section of the exhibition and Juan Restrepo (City of Surrey).

Playing with Fire: Ceramics of the Extraordinary installation in progress.

Photo: Cody Rocko

Ying-Yueh Chuang
Flower Series #1 (detail), 2015
porcelain, fabric
302 cm x 12 cm x 265 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Photo: courtesy of the artist

NOTES

[i] Laurence, Robin. "MOA show Playing With Fire blows away ceramic stereotypes." *Georgia Straight*, 27 November 2019, www.straight.com/arts/1330391. Accessed 30 November, 2019

[i] Amy Gogarty, "Playing With Fire: Extraordinary ceramics engage with contemporary issues. " *Galleries West*, 2 January 2020.

[ii] Amy Gogarty, "If this is What You Call 'Being Civilized", I'd Rather Go Back to Being a 'Savage'." An Open Book, Surrey Art Gallery, 2008, pp. 1-15.

[iii] Beth Carter, Judy Chartrand and Lumlamelut Laura Wee Lay Laq, *Judy Chartrand, What a Wonderful World*. Bill Reid Gallery 2016, p. 36.

[iv] Chuang credits one of her early teachers, Don Hutchinson, in enabling her to understand vessels as persons, with character, shape and shadows.

[v] Gathie Falk with Robin Laurence, *Apples, etc. An Artist's Memoir*. Figure 1 Publishing, Vancouver, 2018, p. 17.

[vi] Ibid, p. 206.

[vii] Ibid, p. 99.

[viii] Canadian Clay & Glass Gallery, *Tree House: Jeremy Hatch*. Exhibition catalogue, 2006.

[ix] Ian Johnston, "The Antechamber," in *Reinventing Consumption*. Esplanade Arts & Heritage Centre, 2013, p. 26.

[x] Between 1955 and 1967, Walter and Herta Gerz, BC Ceramics, commissioned designs from First Nations artists that were applied to their souvenirs and housewares.

[xi] www.studioceramicscanada.com/david-lambert/. Accessed 13 January 2020.

[xii] David Lambert, *The story of west coast designs on hand-made pottery with 40 authentic stories & myths of the Coast People*. 25pp, ill. 1959ff, n.d. (ca. 1960).

[xiii] Ibid, p. 5.

[xiv] Ibid.

[xv] Ibid, p. 4.

[xvi] Ibid.

[xvii] Scott Watson, Naomi Sawada, Jane Tyner (eds), *Thrown: British Columbia's Apprentices of Bernard Leach and their Contemporaries*. Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, University of British Columbia, 2009, p. 141.

[xviii] Matthew Kangas, "Alwyn O'Brien: Astride the Bucket." *Ceramics Monthly*, March 2015.

[xix] Liane Davison, "Introduction," *Hot Clay: Sixteen West Coast Ceramic Artists*, Surrey Art Gallery, 2004, p. 6.

[xx] Amy Gogarty, "Where I was Brought Up: 4949 Harris Road." An Open Book, Surrey Art Gallery, 2007, p. 4.

[xxi] Unpublished manuscript, 2005.

[xxii] www.debrasloan.com/artist-statement. Accessed 23 January 2020.

[xxiii] Ronnie Watt, "Interlinked Themes, Multiple Meanings – The Oeuvre of the Canadian Ceramist Debra Sloan." *Ceramics of Southern Africa*, Vol. 16.1, Winter 2018, pp. 11-13.

[xxiv] Rachel Rosenfield Lafo, *The future is already here* (exhibition catalogue). Surrey Art Gallery, 2013.

POSTSCRIPT

When planning the exhibition *Playing with Fire: Ceramics of the Extraordinary*, I selected artists who had chosen the medium of clay to express ideas and critiques about the world around them. I took a risk and focused on the political, cultural and personal issues they examine through their work, plus their use of humour, beauty, fragility, nostalgia, controversy and even anger to make the case. My intent was to move the conversation away from vessel to sculpture, from functional to interpretive, from passive to involved.

All exhibitions involve curatorial risk. Once installed there is no way of predicting how visitors will interpret what they see, or whether their experiences will mesh with curatorial intentions. How invisible is the curator's vision, and how much of her energy permeates the space?

During a recent staff tour I asked, "What will you take away from this exhibition?" The responses were both surprising and very telling for me. "Whenever I come here, it always makes me emotional—yet I keep coming," commented one. Another said, "It seems to be a place to think about loss and grief—perhaps a place to work through these things." Their impressions, though not intended curatorially, remind me about the very power of art to achieve what this exhibit did intend to do: offer insights into the paradox of the human condition.

Carol E. Mayer
February 26th 2020